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ABSTRACT

This report examines the origins, development, content, and implementation of state-level policies that were designed to establish or strengthen educational accountability and effectiveness in the 15 states that are members of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). It provides tables outlining the context and content of such initiatives in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. In the last decade, most SREB state have passed legislation calling for accountability in higher education. In seven states accountability legislation requires periodic reporting on a cluster of performance indicators. In some states, initiatives also require the development of assessment plans and activities, and in some cases specific assessments are mandated. Several policy options for dealing with the projected growth in enrollments, declining state appropriations, and increased expectations for quality and accountability are discussed. (MDM)

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Assessing Quality in Higher Education

POLICY ACTIONS IN THE SREB STATES

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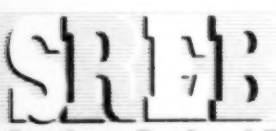

Southern Regional Education Board

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Assessing Quality in Higher Education

POLICY ACTIONS IN THE SREB STATES

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592 Tenth Street, N.W. • Atlanta, Georgia 30318-5790 • 1993

SREB

Southern Regional Education Board

Foreword

Assessing Quality in Higher Education: Policy Actions in the SREB States summarizes the results of a study of state-level policies related to higher education accountability and effectiveness conducted by John Folger (*Emeritus Professor*, Institute for Policy Studies, Vanderbilt University), Grady Bogue (*Professor*, Department of Educational Leadership, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville), and Joseph D. Creech (*Associate Director*, Office of Educational Policies, SREB). This report examines the origins, development, content, and implementation of state-level policies that were designed to establish or strengthen educational accountability and effectiveness in SREB states.

State higher education agencies provided copies of legislation and policies related to higher education assessment and accountability to update information compiled and reported by Gale F. Gaines, *Associate Director for State Services*, SREB. The format for Table 2 is based on a design by Ms. Gaines. In addition to these documents, Dr. Bogue and Dr. Folger conducted telephone interviews with higher education officials in SREB states to obtain their perspective on the policies. Copies of the full report, including detailed state-by-state profiles, are available from SREB at $8.00 per copy.

We appreciate the cooperation of state higher education agencies in providing background material and information and for reviewing drafts of state profiles. Thanks also to Anne Li (SREB *Data Analyst*) and Bobbi Johnstone (a University of Georgia graduate intern at SREB) for their assistance in the collection and review of source material and the production of this report.

BY THE YEAR 2000—

The quality and effectiveness of all colleges and universities will be regularly assessed with particular emphasis on the performance of undergraduate students.

Goals for Education

CHALLENGE 2000

Higher education has entered the 1990s with intense pressures to control costs, improve quality, and serve more students. More students are seeking college, but there has not been a comparable increase in state dollars to invest in their education. Colleges and universities in the SREB states accounted for almost 40 percent of the nation's collegiate enrollment growth over the last decade. However, economic conditions and increased competition for state revenues produced a decline in the percent of the region's state and local government revenue dedicated to higher education–from 9.2 percent in 1984-85 to 8.4 percent in 1989-90.

Shifts in State Policy

In the 1960s and 1970s, state higher education policy centered on the planned expansion of higher education and the promotion of equity in access. In the 1980s, the focus shifted to improving quality. Goals included:

- Improving the pre-college preparation and readiness of college students;
- Assessing the cost and effectiveness of remedial programs;
- Increasing minority participation and success;
- Improving teacher preparation;
- Promoting centers of excellence;
- Increasing the number of outstanding faculty via endowed chairs;
- Stimulating research initiatives and business partnerships to strengthen economic development;
- Developing more effective strategic plans with specific goals and measures of progress.

Some of these goals were supported by special funding, but most of the special funds were reduced or eliminated as state revenues declined in the 1990s.

In the 1990s, state policy interests moved toward:

- The assessment of educational performance and outcomes;
- The development of new higher education accountability measures;
- The improvement of management and educational productivity;
- The refocus and revision of campus missions and the reallocation of resources from lower to higher priority programs.

This shift in policy focus comes in part from greater competition for state revenues from health care, corrections, and elementary/ secondary education. The increased interest in accountability also is connected to the public's diminishing trust in higher education–state leaders feel that higher

Table 1
HIGHER EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT REPORTING

	Annual Comprehensive Accountability Report	Assessment of Student Learning Required	Report on Goal Progress as Part of State Plan	Budget Connection
Alabama	None	Recommended by state agency; being developed	None	No
Arkansas	Legislative requirement	Yes	Being incorporated	Proposed
Florida	Legislative requirement	Yes	Yes	Indirect
Georgia	Incorporated in planning process	Yes	No	No
Kentucky	Legislative requirement	Yes	Yes	Proposed
Louisiana	Legislative requirement	Entry level placement tests	Yes	No
Maryland	Incorporated in master plan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mississippi	None	Under consideration	Under consideration	No
North Carolina	Legislative requirement	Yes	Yes	No
Oklahoma	Incorporated in master plan	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Carolina	Legislative requirement	Yes	Yes	Indirect
Tennessee	Legislative requirement	Yes	Yes	Yes
Texas	Legislative requirement, incorporated in plan and budget	Yes	Yes	Proposed
Virginia	Incorporated in master plan	Yes	Yes	Indirect
West Virginia	Legislative requirement	Yes	Yes	Indirect

education's priorities do not correspond to public priorities. The public has expressed more interest in improving undergraduate education, but higher education administrators and faculty, especially at "flagship" institutions, appear to be emphasizing research and graduate programs.

Legislative Initiatives for Higher Education Accountability

In the last decade, most SREB states have passed legislation calling for accountability in higher education. As a result of interests expressed by governing boards and/or legislators, state higher education agencies in other states have taken the lead in developing accountability policies. In seven SREB states (Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia), accountability legislation requires periodic reporting on a cluster of performance indicators. In Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia, legislation called for state higher education agencies (or a task force established in the legislation) to develop and report on measures of higher education's effectiveness. In Georgia, legislation was proposed but did not pass. The University System of Georgia has established a strategic planning process

for assessing and reporting on the effectiveness of higher education. In some states, initiatives also require the development of assessment plans and activities and, in some cases, specific assessments are mandated (for example, assessment of general education knowledge and skill). Because of executive and legislative interests in increased productivity, special studies have been conducted to determine faculty workload and/or the time it takes students to earn a bachelor's degree.

In most states, these accountability measures were preceded by new accreditation requirements from both regional and specialized accrediting agencies. Requirements for accreditation shifted to institutional effectiveness and institutions are directed to identify improvement goals, assess progress toward the goals, and take specific actions to achieve them.

A few states, Tennessee, for example, have linked assessments and plans to budgets, so that specific funds are provided to encourage and reward improvement. Performance funding can have a built-in accountability.

Current and Future Policy Options

Several policy options for dealing with (1) growth in enrollments, (2) level or declining state appropriations, and (3) increased expectations for quality and accountability are being considered and/or adopted in most states. They include:

- Increasing tuition and fees to make up for decreased revenues from state government, but these actions may reduce educational opportunity unless accompanied by increases in student aid;
- Eliminating duplicative programs and closing institutions have been proposed in some states, but the politics are difficult;
- Reorganizing or major restructuring of higher education governance to achieve a more efficient system; and,
- Redesigning educational delivery systems to make them more effective and economical.

Serious discussion of these major alternatives for dealing with the altered political and economic environment has taken place in a few states, but there is little agreement within and among states about which choice is best. Clearly, higher education is at a moment in its history where incremental changes may not suffice–a moment that requires re-invention and innovation to meet the challenge of the future.

"State-level policies" are those adopted by legislative action, executive order, or formal action of statewide governing or coordinating boards and apply to public colleges and universities. "Educational accountability and effectiveness policies" are policies that:

- Define strategic goals and initiatives for a state and require a public report on the achievement of those goals;
- Require establishing institutional goals and reporting to the public on progress in achieving those goals;
- Require and/or support specific actions designed to improve the quality of higher education;
- Mandate assessment and/or evaluation of educational programs and services and a report to the public on results and how these findings were used to improve programs, policies, and service;
- Call for design and implementation of programs to strengthen program or personnel productivity and a report to the public on results.

(Contined on page 11)

Table 2
LEGISLATIVELY REQUIRED
ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING

	Arkansas	Florida
Background	Legislation in 1987, 1989, and 1991 required testing of general education outcomes, established annual report on effectiveness of the delivery of higher education, beginning 1992.	State Board of Education began a performance indicator project in early 1980s; 1991 legislation required an annual report that monitored performance level in instruction, research, and public service at the system.
Standards and Goals	Developed by Department of Higher Education in consultation with institutional representatives. Broad areas specified in legislation.	Legislation specified nine goals: ■ Total student credit hours produced, by institution and disciplin.; ■ Total number degrees awarded, by institution and discipline. ■ Total number of contact hours of instruction produced, by faculty rank, course level, and institution. ■ Pass rates on professional licensure exams, by institution. ■ Institutional quality as assessed by surveys of alumni, parents, and employers. ■ Length of time required to complete credits for an academic degree, by institution. ■ Enrollment, progression, retention, and graduation rates, by race, gender, and disability. ■ Analysis of student demand for courses. ■ Classroom utilization.
Reporting Requirements	Legislative requirements: ■ Assess institutions in student achievement and research accomplishment. ■ Administer a "rising junior" test. ■ Job placement, job retention, and wage rates. ■ Comparisons with peers (in other states) on: GRE, LSAT, GMAT, NTE, MCAT, etc. ■ Programs that could be internationally competitive. ■ Annual report to governor and legislature.	Legislative requirements: ■ Credit hours produced, by institution and discipline. ■ Total degrees awarded, by institution and discipline. ■ Total contact hours of instruction, by faculty rank, institution, and course level. ■ Pass rates in professional licensure exams. ■ Follow-up surveys of alumni, parents, and employees. ■ Time to earn degree and number of credits, by institution and degree. ■ Enrollment, progression, retention and graduation, by race and gender. ■ Analysis of student demand for courses; ■ Classroom utilization. Goals and measures are associated with most of the required measures.
First Report	1992	1992

Table 2
LEGISLATIVELY REQUIRED ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING

	Kentucky	Louisiana
Background	A 1991 state strategic plan called for "reports on the results of higher education." 1992 legislation mandated systematic annual evaluation of quality and effectiveness. Reports required on 14 indicators specified in legislation.	1986 legislation required institutions to test English and math skills of entering students. In 1991, the Board of Regents established policies for a uniform reporting system, master planning process, and program review and evaluation process. 1993 legislation mandated development of a plan for institutional accountability.
Standards and Goals	Established by Kentucky Commission on Higher Education in consultation with the institutions.	The 1993 legislation established the Public Higher Education Advisory Committee (comprised of representatives of the Board of Regents, the three systems, and individual institutions) to design a plan for an accountability process and report recommendations to governor and legislature by March 30, 1994.
Reporting Requirements	Legislative requirements: ■ Total student credit hours, by institution and discipline. ■ Degrees awarded, by institution and discipline. ■ Instructional contact hours, by institution, faculty rank, and course level. ■ Pass rates on professional licensure examinations. ■ Institutional quality as measured by follow-up surveys. ■ Time and credits required to complete academic degrees, by institution and degrees. ■ Enrollment, persistence, retention, and graduation rates, by race, gender, and disability. ■ Analysis of student demand for courses. ■ Classroom utilization. ■ Faculty workload. ■ Research and public service activities. ■ Number and percentage of accredited programs and programs eligible for accreditation. ■ Students in remedial courses; students exiting remedial courses and successfully completing entry-level courses. ■ Two-year transfer students completing four-year degree.	Legislative requirements: ■ Total student credit hours produced, by institution and discipline. ■ Total number of degrees awarded, by institution and discipline. ■ Total number of contact hours of instruction produced, by faculty, institution, rank, and course level. ■ Faculty workload. ■ Pass rates of professional licensure exams, by institution. ■ Institutional quality as assessed by follow-up surveys of alumni, parents, and employers. ■ Length of time and number of academic credits required to complete academic degree, by institution and degree. ■ Enrollment, progression, retention, and graduation rates. ■ Analysis of student demand for courses. ■ Evaluation of remedial and developmental programs; total number of students in remedial courses, and those students exiting remedial courses and successfully completing entry-level courses. ■ Student transfers between two-year and four-year institutions.
First Report	1993	1994

Table 2
LEGISLATIVELY REQUIRED
ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING

	Maryland	North Carolina
Background	1988 legislation required each institution to submit a "Performance Accountability Plan" to include: statement of outcomes expected, quantifiable indices of student academic performance, other performance objectives in addition to student learning. Annual reporting required.	1989 legislation directed UNC Board of Governors to measure effectiveness of: 1) student learning; 2) faculty quality and development; 3) progress on mission achievement. Plans for assessment developed by 1990-91; annual assessments 1991-1995.
Standards and Goals	Established by Governing Board and approved by Commission on Higher Education. Process involves extensive consultation with institutions.	Standards established by UNC Board of Governors; institutions developed goals which were approved or disapproved by UNC Board of Governors.
Reporting Requirements	Report format and definitions not specified in legislation. Institution reports must include: ■ Minority enrollment and achievement ■ Student outcomes and achievement ■ Comprehensive financial plans and cost-containment information Guidelines for reports are issued by Commission on Higher Education.	Legislative requirements are not specific, but UNC Board of Governors has developed: ■ Measures of academic preparation of entering students. ■ Measures to assess general education. ■ Measures to assess learning in the major. ■ Specialized accreditation reviews and internal program review.; ■ Student retention and graduation. ■ Student rating of teaching. ■ Access to higher education by ethnic status. ■ Degrees awarded, by level. ■ Organized research volume. ■ Community service awards.
First Report	1992	1992

Table 2
LEGISLATIVELY REQUIRED ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTS

	South Carolina	Tennessee
Background	1988 "cutting edge" legislation established a strategic planning, goal-setting, and evaluation process. 1992 legislation mandated annual report on achievement.	In 1980 five performance funding requirements were established that were tied to budget. 1984 legislation initiated annual benchmark reporting on 15 measures; not tied to the budget. Challenge 2000 legislation in 1989 mandated reporting in 11 areas; not tied to budget, but some measures similar to performance funding. 1992 legislation established an amended set of reporting requirements.
Standards and Goals	Established by South Carolina Commission on Higher Education in consultation with institutions.	Established by Tennessee Higher Education Commission in consultation with institutional boards.
Reporting Requirements	Legislative requirements: ■ Number and percentage of accredited programs and programs eligible for accreditation. ■ Number and percentage of students who complete their degree program. ■ Percentage of lower-division courses taught by full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and graduate assistants. ■ Students in remedial courses; students exiting remedial courses and successfully completing entry-level courses. ■ Percent of graduate and upper-division undergraduate students participating in sponsored research program. ■ Placement data on graduates. ■ Minority student enrollment; change over five years. ■ Student transfers between two-year institutions and four-year institutions. ■ Pass rates and scores on professional licensure examinations. ■ Information on institutional role and mission. ■ Alumni satisfaction.	Legislative requirements: ■ Number and percentage of accredited programs and programs eligible for accreditation. ■ Percentage of students accepted from those applying; percentage meeting admissions standards; average ACT scores of newly admitted students. ■ Number and percentage of students who complete their degree program. ■ Number of degrees awarded, by discipline. ■ Percentage of lower-division courses taught by full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and graduate assistants. ■ Students in remedial courses; students exiting remedial courses and successfully completing entry-level courses. ■ African-American student enrollment; change over five years. ■ Pass rates and scores on professional licensure examinations. ■ Job placement rates of vocational program graduates. ■ Student transfer between two-year institutions and four-year institutions. ■ Alumni satisfaction.
First Report	1989; 1993 for new legislation	1990; 1993 for modified report

Table 2
LEGISLATIVELY REQUIRED
ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING

	Texas	West Virginia
Background	1989's Education Opportunity Plan with biennial reporting was required by legislature. In 1989 and 1991 legislature mandated a performance funding program that provides performance accountability measures. The 1991 legislation mandated strategic planning and goal-setting as the basis for budget justification. Accountability mandates are reflected in several different documents.	In 1989 higher education was reorganized; legislature directed new Governing Boards to develop accountability plans. 1991 and 1993 legislation require all public institutions to report each year on performance indicators.
Standards and Goals	Established by Texas Higher Education Board in consultation with legislation and institution.	Developed by Governing Boards in consultation with institutions and with legislative approval.
Reporting Requirements	Under development.	Legislative requirements: ■ Student entrance examination scores. ■ Percentage of freshmen in developmental courses. ■ Student grade point average and/or appropriate testing measures. ■ Graduation rates, by institution and for athletes, by sex and athletic program. ■ Pass rates on professional licensure examinations. ■ Student mobility. ■ Students on academic or athletic fee waivers, by institution and by resident and non-resident status. ■ Number of degrees granted, by institution. ■ Enrollment, by institution, program, resident/non-resident status, sex, and race. ■ Expenditures per student. ■ Student/faculty and student/administrator ratios. ■ Faculty and administrator rank and experience, by institution, minorities, and women. ■ Faculty turnover. ■ Percent of classes taught by adjunct and part-time faculty. ■ Campus crime statistics.
First Report	1991 on Educational Opportunity	1992

The Southern Regional Education Board's survey of state higher education agencies and review of state policies and legislation shows that:

(1) The emphasis in the SREB states has shifted from funding programs designed to improve higher education to ways of increasing productivity and accountability. Special funding initiated in the 1980s for program improvement, recruitment of eminent faculty, and other improvements has been greatly reduced or eliminated in the 1990s in almost all SREB states.

(2) Twelve SREB states (Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia) have adopted some legislation on higher education accountability in the last five years. Performance indicator reporting is a central part of recent legislation in Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia; in other states (Georgia, Maryland, Oklahoma, and Virginia), strategic plans require reports to the public on progress in achieving objectives. Only two SREB states (Alabama and Mississippi) do not have periodic comprehensive reports on higher education achievement and effectiveness.

(3) Most SREB states now require annual reports from institutions on specific indicators of institutional, student, and faculty performance. In some states, these indicators are tied to specific goals in statewide plans and institutional missions. In others, the indicators provide general information (for example, the number of degrees awarded by field) that give a partial picture of institutional operations and outcomes and the general condition of education.

(4) Annual reporting by public institutions of information about a uniform set of indicators (such as completion rates of entering students, or proportion of freshmen being taught by regular faculty) is new. In seven of the states that require reports, the first report was made in 1992 or later.

(5) In most states, indicators include some measures of students' performance in their major and/or in general education and alumni evaluations of their college experience.

(6) In all states, indicators related to undergraduate education are emphasized, although most states also have measures of research and public service activities.

(7) Most of the reports require some new data collection and developing standard definitions and formats for presenting data. (For example, *What is the definition of a "degree-seeking student"?* And *What is a uniform procedure for determining the percent of entering students who graduate?*)

(8) Tennessee has a series of measures that are tied directly to budget consequences–*performance funding*–and Texas has mandated (but did not fund) a similar approach. In all other states, there is no direct connection between accountability reports and budgets, although reports may influence budget decisions.

(9) Indicators being reported in most states give a partial and very general picture of the operation and outcomes of colleges and universities.

State higher education officials generally agree that formal accountability processes are here to stay. There is also skepticism that the current forms of accountability reporting will have a positive impact on the way that institutions are managed or on the state policy-making process. While most states have just begun to make annual reports, questions are already being raised about who will use them and what purpose they serve beyond the symbolic ones of openness and accountability.

Accountability reporting is a substantial requirement; it takes time and effort by institutions and state agencies to develop common definitions and reporting formats, and to collect, summarize, and report the data. States require these reports as the basis for judgment about the adequacy of their higher education systems. Adequacy has to be judged against expectations and standards. Those states that have connected their accountability reporting to strategic plans and goals should have a more useful framework for judging adequacy than those who have not.

The test of the value of accountability reports is twofold: (1) Do the reports lead to improvement in campus operations and student learning? (2) Does the report contribute to better policymaking and decisions at the state level?

An Evaluation of Policy Impact

For most state-level accountability policy initiatives, an evaluation of their impact has not yet occurred.

- Have state policies, for example, produced constructive and substantive educational changes at the campus level, or have campus responses been largely cosmetic and adaptive?
- Has the implementation of state accountability policies led to increased awareness of, confidence in, and support of higher education?
- Are political and educational leaders using the extensive accountability reporting?
- Do states have policies that support improvement in both favorable and unfavorable economic times, and do these policies survive changes in leadership at the executive level?